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Joel M. Halpern

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Just as the novelist uses his artistic license to shape reality in order to more dramatically present a particular point of view, so we have in our contemporary society certain situations which, by their uniqueness, may help give us a broader understanding of certain worldwide problems. Laos offers us this possibility. Here the conditions of previously colonial and economically backward countries are exaggerated, but their very exaggeration can give us new viewpoints and perhaps suggest fresh approaches. It is with this in mind that the following paper is presented.

Certainly the situation existing in Laos today is not found, at least not to the same degree, in any other area of the world. The kingdom of Laos, land-locked in the heart of Southeast Asia, is about the size of the State of Oregon. The population is estimated to be about two million. There are no railroads. The number of roads linking the administrative capital of Vientiane to the provincial towns are extremely limited, and most of them are impassable during the rainy season. There are no telephone connections among the towns of Laos (although radio and telegraph contacts do exist).

This country has probably the smallest number of college educated people of any sovereign nation. There is only one fully trained doctor, only one pharmacist, two fully qualified engineers and less than half a dozen men with any training in law. Most of the ministers have had the equivalent of a United States junior highschool education. This holds true not only for the present generation of Lao government officials, that is, men in their forties or fifties, but also for the younger people in their early twenties who now hold government positions. Few of the young Lao sent to study in French universities have been willing or able to complete their courses and obtain degrees. There are at present less than half a dozen Lao students in the United States.

Approximately half the population of Laos is ethnically non-Lao and is composed of tribal peoples speaking languages mutually unintelligible to the Lao. It is estimated that less than 10 per cent of the total population of the kingdom lives in urban centers. Of this 10 per cent at least half are non-Lao and include Chinese merchants, Vietnamese craftsmen, French businessmen, Indian and Pakistani cloth sellers and various types of American and European officials.

Isolated from world trade routes and for decades an unknown corner of French Indochina, in and after the Second World War Laos experienced in turn Japanese invasion, occupation by Chinese troops, the reestablishment of the French colonial regime, the Indochina War and independence. During the days of French colonial administration Laos was regarded as a kind of Shangri-la, an exotic retreat. The events of World War II and the Indochina war do not appear to have affected the fundamental cultural patterns of Laos. Her sudden emergence five years ago as an independent nation resulted in membership in the United Nations and the establishment of Royal Lao Embassies in Paris, London, Washington and the major capitals of Asia. Vientiane has changed from a tranquil provincial town to a national capital with ministries, a national assembly, traffic jams, night clubs and air-conditioned movies.

Since 1954 the United States government has taken over from France the basic economic responsibility for Laos. There is a question in the minds of many as to whether Laos really constitutes an independent political entity. Over the past five years the United States has spent approximately two hundred million dollars in Laos (precise figures are not publicly available) and has been actively concerned with her political and economic affairs. The following American government

organizations operate in Laos: the Embassy, Information Service, aid program [United States Operations Mission (USOM)], and a Program Evaluation Office (the military advisory group). With so much money and effort being expended in Laos, it might be well to examine the impact of American policies and programs on the following aspects of Lao society and culture: ethnic groups, Buddhism, village society, the official elite and, finally, the American community.

Ethnic Groups

Since they constitute about 50 per cent of the population the Lao are the dominant group in the kingdom politically, socially, and culturally. They are valley dwelling Buddhist farmers who derive their main livelihood from raising rice in irrigated fields. Related historically and culturally to the people of Thailand, their way of life is almost indistinguishable from that of the inhabitants of northeast Thailand who are also known as Lao and with whom they share a common language closely related to Thai. There is, indeed, some question as to whether Laos would today be an independent state if certain minor kingdoms and provinces of Thailand had not been annexed and combined by the French in the process of acquiring Indochina less than a century ago.

There are certain provinces such as Nam Tha in the north and Attapeu in the south where the overwhelming majority of the inhabitants are non-Lao. In the Lao government's attempt to minimize the distinctiveness of the various tribal groups and bring them together as citizens of Laos, they have set up a classification of ethnic minority based on settlement patterns: the Lao-Tai or lowland Lao, the Lao-Teng or upland Lao and the Lao-Som or Lao of the mountaintops. (In this classification the Lao refer to themselves as Lao-Lum, or valley Lao). The system is not in general usage in Laos, and after introducing it below, the various tribal groups will henceforth be referred to in this discussion by the names traditionally used by the Lao. Many tribal groups related to those in Laos live in neighboring North and South Vietnam and northeast Thailand and others are found in Burma.

The first category represents tribal Thai groups such as the Thai Dam (Black Thai) and does not include the dominant valley Lao themselves; however, the two groups are related in ethnic origins and in language. Like the Lao, the Lao-Tai traditionally had petty kingdoms. Today the Lao-Tai live mainly in the north of Laos and cultivate irrigated rice. They differ from the Lao in certain animistic beliefs and in the social structure of their communities, but perhaps the most significant

difference in terms of our concern here is the fact that the valley Lao make a sharp distinction between themselves and the Lao-Tai. This is reflected in the proportionate lack of access of tribal Thai to education and in their relatively small numbers in government posts.

The Lao-Teng, more commonly known as Kha (the Lao word for slave), are the largest of the ethnic minorities. They are divided into many groups such as Khmu, Kha Ko and others with varying customs and economies, some even speaking mutually unintelligible languages. The Kha are the aboriginal inhabitants of Laos and generally rank lowest in the social scale. Living chiefly on mountainsides, they cultivate upland rice in patches cleared from forested slopes by burning.

The Lao-Som are the most recent arrivals in Laos, having migrated south from China largely during the past century. They live in northern Laos and are more familiarly known as the Meo and Yao. In the raising of opium they have an important cash crop.

Among the many problems faced by these groups as they seek a readjustment from their traditionally inferior status with reference to the Lao are the questions of education, participation in the national government and sharing the fruits of

modern western technology, to which they have all been exposed to varying degrees. How then is this situation reconcilable with the terms one often hears about the peoples of Laos, especially the tribal peoples -- terms such as "isolated," "indifferent" and "twelfth century?" A partial answer is that they are today simultaneously isolated and indifferent, discontented and conscious of change. This becomes apparent if we take a closer look at the way in which these people live.

Flying over Laos, particularly over northern Laos, one can spot many isolated villages high in the mountains. They consist of a settlement of two to three to about a dozen houses. Occasionally only a single dwelling will be noted. The settlements are surrounded by fields, gaping patches of charred mountainside where slash-and-burn cultivation is practiced. Here is clearly a case of isolation, for in northern Laos market towns of any size are few and far between. But a closer look at the landscape yields circuitous threads winding down through the forest. These are rough mountain trails, some so steep and slippery that not even hardy mountain ponies can negotiate them. Many are impassable during the monsoon season. Despite their limitations, however, these trails are a real means of communication and arteries of trade. Their winding courses can be traced from tribal settlements down into a Lao

valley market town, even though it may take a man a week or two to make the trip on foot.

Although the way of life of many of the tribal groups might appear aboriginal and spartan to the westerner, these groups are absolutely dependent on trade for their very lives. The trails are vital supply lines. A few of the items the tribal peoples purchase include salt, metal knives and cloth, plus occasional luxuries such as kerosene, sugar and guns. The Meo manufacture their own guns but must buy sulphur and nitrate to make gunpowder.

Even in the small towns there are side effects of trade, for it is here that the tribal man first comes into contact with government officials, airplanes, automobiles (if only jeeps), and possibly movies and clinics. He also is introduced to many consumer items such as radios, which he desires and cannot afford. We have, then, isolation and dissatisfaction -- isolation in a sense that his appearance in the trading center is infrequent, and dissatisfaction in being confronted with all kinds of new goods and services of which he can take advantage only to a limited extent.

It would be easy to say that the dominant Lao have exploited the tribal peoples, the Communists have cultivated them and

American policy has ignored them. There are elements of truth in this, but the actual situation is considerably more complex.

Imagine a scene at a small market town in the north. There are Meo, with their heavy silver neck-rings, Khmu with towel turbans. Yao women in intricately embroidered trousers, and Kha Ko in beads and indigo leggings. By merely sitting around at the morning market, it is possible to see many types of ethnic relationships. The Lao women of the town come to bargain with the tribal men and women who have made the long trip down from their mountain homes to sell a few potatoes or betel leaves. In these small exchanges the tribal people are usually paid in cash. They receive some paper bills with which they are unfamiliar. They are not sure if they have received the correct amount for their product, but their protests and doubts subside into passive resignation.

Across the way one may see a group of Khmu men, women and children hard at work breaking rock for a road. They have come down to work for a few weeks during the dry season, in order to earn enough to buy a supply of salt, a few metal implements and perhaps some clothing. Then they return to their upland villages. They are usually unable to speak more than a few words of Lao. This, however, does not prevent them from forming ideas about life in the town. These ideas do not include

any feeling of their own participation in the government. If, for example, a tribesman is accused of a crime and is brought to court, proceedings are always conducted in Lao. Only rarely are interpreters provided.

Yet many tribal people do bring back to their mountain villages images of all the material goods and wonderful things they have seen. Unable to achieve satisfaction through rational means such as trading or the fruits of their own labor, it is not surprising that they, like many other peoples in similar situations, resort to magical means. Sometimes this takes the form of a legend concerning a prophet who will launch them into a new way of life. For the past few years in the province of Luang Prabang and neighboring areas, the myth of Djiung has been circulating from one Khmu mountain village to another. Djiung, so the story goes, is the white king of the Khmu who lives in a vast cave located somewhere in the north. At present, believers are told, he is not strong enough to leave the cave, but if all the Khmu will cease their work, sacrifice their livestock and feast as a sign of respect, he will come to them. Some Khmu say they have actually seen the cave, where Djiung presides over a weird empire of mounds of rice, piles of clothing, rows of jeeps, airplanes, medicines, blankets, and guns, all waiting to be distributed to his people. They need

only have patience and await his coming. Often Djiung's appearance is predicted at a critical time in the planting season, and some Khmu have been in very real danger of starving to death. The Lao officials have dealt with this by arresting the propagators of the myth and forcing the others to resume work in the fields.

The present writer, during his service with the American aid mission in Laos, had suggested that somehow the concept of Djiung be considered by both Lao and American officials when planning rural aid because, in effect, the Americans were supplying the treasures in the cave and both the Americans and Lao, but chiefly the latter were in effect acting as agents of the prophet. This approach was rejected as necessitating too much of an involvement in tribal matters.

Much has been written about the so-called underdeveloped peoples of the world being interested only in filling their bellies and learning how to raise better crops rather than in the more abstruse concepts of government: It is interesting to mention here still another legend. This one and the attempt at its propagation occurred in the summer of 1959, in a Meo settlement only 60 miles from Vientiane. Near this particular Meo village is a country inn frequented by high Lao government

officials, so that the tribal people are in contact with Lao officials more often than is usual. A Meo villager went to work for some missionaries near the capital and returned to the village about six months later with this proclamation: Jesus Christ, 18 feet tall, riding in a jeep and dressed as an American, would shortly appear in the village. Unlike Djiung, he would not distribute gifts but would lead the Meo to the Promised Land, that is, to Vientiane, where they would take over control of the country from the Lao. The spokesman was well received by many of his fellow-villagers and instructed them to depose the local government-appointed officials. The officials informed the police, and the man was jailed.

It is tempting to make the Lao and their political leaders the villains of the situation, but before taking this easy path let us examine some other approaches. It is true that the tribal people are often cheated in the market place and exploited as corvée labor (this practice is officially forbidden), but it is also true that there are longstanding traditional trading relationships which have existed between Lao farmers and different mountain tribes. Lao villagers speaking tribal languages have often acted as intermediaries between the tribal people and the Lao government. During the time of the French, when head taxes

were imposed, these lam (interpreters) paid the taxes for their tribal associates; in return, the lam received forest products such as bamboo, betel and wild game, plus the labor of the mountain people.

There have also been important ritual relationships. After more than a thousand years of Buddhism, belief in various animistic spirits continues to coexist with more formal religious practices among the Lao. Almost the entire population of Laos believes in these spirits, or phi. The mountain peoples, having lived in the country longer, are felt to be more intimately acquainted with them. Thus on certain occasions the Lao have invited the Khmu, for example, to participate with them in buffalo sacrifices. When the French built the royal palace in Luang Prabang at the turn of the century, the first person to enter was a Khmu chieftain who made peace with the resident phi.

The Lao are not a combative or aggressive people, and their errors in dealing with tribal peoples have been largely those of omission. They have failed to provide schools, health services and roads, but then, it is also true that many of the valley Lao also lack these services. The Lao attitude is that Laos is a small country, and the only way for all the inhabitants to survive is to have the tribal peoples become Laotianized.

Therefore, no local languages are used in schools or government courts. A country only recently emerged into nationhood in the modern world cannot be expected to have much perspective on these matters, and perhaps not even to realize their profound political implications. This is not to excuse the Lao, but both their leaders and their trained human resources are extremely limited.

The government maintains that the tribal people have the same voting privileges as the Lao. However, aside from one French-educated Meo family long associated with the Lao, which has two members in the National Assembly, the only other tribal representative is a Kha, who is a member of the Communist Pathet Lao. Few of the tribal people hold offices on the district level, and there are only a few junior officers in the Army. The Lao government's only real gesture of recognition of non-Lao languages has been through a recently inaugurated Lao Information Service project, a daily ten minute news broadcast in Meo and in one of the Kha dialects.

What is the American attitude toward this situation? Many of the American officials stationed in Laos are sincere and conscientious. They are engaged in a multitude of projects the aims of which are to better the living conditions of the peoples of Laos and further the economic development of the country.

The programs, ambitious in scope, range from road construction to public health nursing and technical education. Potential programs which are not purely technical or political in the strict sense of the word are usually sidetracked or ignored. There seems to be a lack of desire to grope with broadly defined cultural and political problems. The relationships between the Lao and the mountain people is one of these.

There are a few partial exceptions, the most significant of which is the work of the United States Information Service which has produced a film on the minority peoples, emphasizing the unity of the country. It has a Lao sound-track. Some of the minority groups have also been featured in various Lao language publications and posters which are distributed throughout the Kingdom. The net effect of this propaganda is difficult to assess since only one public opinion survey has been made, limited largely to attitudes toward America.

The work of International Voluntary Services which has set up an agricultural training center in the Meo area of the province of Xieng Khouang, and that of Operation Brotherhood, the Philippine medical teams working in both Lao and tribal areas, should also be noted. Both these projects are supported by United States aid funds, but neither pretends to be a comprehensive approach to the problem. Nor is there any American

official among the dozens of planners and coordinators whose job is primarily concerned with the question of the tribal peoples. No orderly information exists in American files on even the number of tribal groups, to say nothing of their general economies and value systems. Nor do many American officials see the need for such information.

A number of Americans, particularly the technicians, have adopted the Lao attitude of assimilation as the only solution. This might be a possible answer, if infinite time were involved and if Laos did not have neighbors bent on destroying her social and political system. But even the policy of assimilation is at most an implicit one; to the best of my knowledge, the Lao government has no explicit policy with regard to her minority groups. Government officials in effect still practice discrimination, as, for example, in the allocation of funds for schools and other projects.

In the past year many thousands of tribal Thai, Kha and Meo refugees have entered Laos from North Vietnam and China, fleeing the communes and other harsh measures of the Communists. However, the fact that autonomous tribal areas have been set up by the Communists in the regions bordering Laos is not without significance. Here these groups have their own administration,

in the sense that Communist directives are carried out by local people. They also have schools in their own language. National autonomous areas are, of course, nothing new, and these appear to be modeled on the Soviet practice but with local innovations. It should be emphasized here that according to official Lao news dispatches many of the troops which have been fighting the Royal Lao Army are composed of Black Thai and Meo. The Black Thai and Meo who live in Laos, although they may fear the Communists, do not appear to wish to fight on the side of the Royal Lao government.

It would be a distortion of facts to say that the tribal peoples are against the Lao government. Nearer the truth would be to state that although only some are in sympathy with the Communists, those who will positively support the Lao government are few. Many Lao officials are seriously concerned, but so far no coordinated efforts appear to have been made in this direction. One proposal heard with increasing frequency in various agencies of the Lao government is that of resettlement of the tribal peoples in the valleys. In the lowland areas, so the argument goes, they will be more closely linked with the government and they will also be able to farm more productively without destroying the forests. Some upland communities have begun to move down, with a limited amount of government aid,

and in rare cases, entirely on their own. The Lao government, however, lacks the resources to undertake resettlement programs on a national scale, and American planners do not view the situation as one meriting their attention and funds. There have been no investigations of those who have moved down and the types of problems they have faced. Here is an example of lack of imagination and flexibility in our government's program planning.

There is no question but that resettlement can offer an attractive possibility to many tribal people. The attitude of the sole Yao working in the Lao government's Civil Action program, an intensive rural development project, is interesting in this connection. He is a young man of 20 with approximately six years of schooling in a small market town in northern Laos. His goal in life is to save enough money from his government service in order to return to his village and resettle his entire patrilineal family in a nearby valley. He cited as advantages access to a school, a clinic, better farming conditions and the opinion that it is more civilized to live in a valley.

It is not the present writer's contention that resettlement is the answer to improving relations between the Lao and minority groups, but that it is a possibility which deserves being explored. Other possible approaches include the use of minority languages

in the first few years of primary school. Certain Kha groups, for instance, refuse to allow textbooks written in Lao in their villages. They claim this is offensive to their spirits. There is obviously a certain amount of nationalistic feeling involved here. The use of interpreters in courts should be considered. The allocation of educational and health facilities to the mountain people on an equitable basis would also be desirable.

An increasing sophistication in the use of techniques of information and propaganda would also help. The author was present at a lecture given by a Civic Action worker to a group of Kha Ko tribesmen in Muong Sing in Nam The Province. These village headsmen, averaging between thirty and fifty years of age, had been summoned to the district town for a week-long indoctrination course. The course was administered in the following way: The headmen were seated in a semi-circle around the desk of the Lao official, who read to them from a mimeographed form. They listened obediently. The document was read in Lao and translated by a second man into the Tai Lu language. A third person then re-translated it from Lu to Kha Ko. When I asked some of the Kha Ko headmen what they thought of having schools in their village, having just received the lecture on the values of education, they replied that the phi would not

permit it and that learning to write Lao would be showing disrespect for their ancestors. This attitude is widespread throughout the whole of Laos. The junior Lao official, a young man in his late teens, was carrying out his work in a very formal and authoritarian manner, and the net result of his efforts appeared to be negligible. It is hard to see how such procedures can be effective in uniting the country and in giving the mountain people a sense of participation in the national life.

Informally, certain Lao deputies in the National Assembly have dealt with the problem of minorities in their own peculiarly paternalistic way. They have gone out into minority villages showing movies, talking to the people and occasionally distributing gifts of clothing and medicine. In one instance, a deputy brought several Yao headmen down to Vientiane and had one of his assistants show them around the capital. Although well-intentioned, these methods are hardly to be considered serious solutions to the question.

The United States has sent to Laos experts in fields as diverse as pig-breeding and malaria control. Is it not possible to have people with the knowledge of minority problems to investigate the situation in Laos and make positive suggestions? A French scholar recently visiting Vientiane presented some

lectures on methods used by the North Vietnamese. Although intended as a critical survey and exposé, many young Lao in the School of Public Administration were favorably impressed by what they were told. Thus, the lectures were actually making propaganda for the Communists. Certainly the United States working with the government of Laos, can present an alternative.

Of course it is not possible for the American government to lay down absolute policies and expect the Lao government to follow them. But as a chief supplier of aid, we obviously have a position of great influence, which we appear willing to exercise in certain political situations of international concern but are evidently reluctant to use to help stabilize the internal scene.

The Position of Buddhism

Buddhism in Laos might at first be considered marginal to American interests and more particularly to planning in the diplomatic and economic aid fields. This point of view could be accepted if our interests in Southeast Asia were narrowly defined. On the contrary, very broad aims have been expressed in public policy declarations in which the United States has committed herself to maintaining Laos' independence and freedom

from Communist control, in addition to aiding her economic development. Many of our difficulties have come about because the implementation of these goals has been too narrowly interpreted. In order to implement broad aims which encompass the whole of the society and culture, interest is shown only in terms of formal diplomatic procedures, information activities and certain fields of economic and technical assistance. It is not my contention here that these fields of activities are necessarily limited in their influence; in fact it is possible to maintain the opposite. The key concept should be interest -- conceiving the culture as a whole and seeing the effect of our various efforts and programs as part of the total picture. This would help American officials plan their programs with greater effectiveness. Currently the effect of various United States activities are being felt in all phases of Lao life including the official religion.

Hinayana Buddhism has had a history of approximately 1000 years in Laos. As indicated earlier it continues to coexist with the cult of the phi. Since Christianity has made relatively few inroads the Buddhism of the valley Lao is without question the dominant religion of the kingdom. The Lao constitution specifies that the King must be a fervent Buddhist. Monks participate in almost all official ceremonies and government

officials pay homage to them on state occasions and in many private ways as well. In most villages the Abbot of the wat, the pagoda, is the most respected figure in the community.

The precise relationships between Buddhism and American programs and policy in Laos can be most clearly seen if we begin by examining the ways in which American agencies have come into direct contact with the monks or have incorporated references to Buddhism into their programs. American Embassy officials deal almost entirely with the formal political hierarchy, and the military aid mission deals with their counterparts in the Army. Here we have an interesting side effect caused in large measure by the United States military aid program and to a lesser extent by the economic aid mission's police program. Formerly, most Lao young men became novices or monks for periods ranging from several months to several years and in many cases completed their education in the pagoda. Becoming a monk was a way of paying a spiritual debt to one's parents and achieving status within the community; this applied to both villagers and townsfolk.

Within the last few years many jobs have opened up in both the Army and the police. To the average Lao they pay extremely well, the uniforms and work are glamorous and in addition the jobs provide extra sources of income either through

obtaining supplies or straight graft (although the latter opportunities are certainly not universal). As one village Abbot expressed it, "Our young men would rather become policemen than monks and now value money more than honor." This may be something of an exaggeration. It is not only the monks who are affected. A school administrator remarked, "When it comes time to look for a job, the most intelligent young men first go to the army, then to the police, and only after they had been refused work in government offices do they come to us as a last resort." Military aid seems to be weakening a moral system without offering a positive alternative.

Two other American programs are more directly involved with the priesthood; these are the Information Service and the Community Development Division of the aid mission. USIS, recognizing the fact that the monks constitute a significant and respected element in the community and that the average citizen has great respect for them and for Buddhism, has approached this problem in two ways. Perhaps the less important of these is what might be called the use of Buddhist type propaganda on a large scale. This includes printed materials, exhibits and films, many of which appeared in honor of the Twenty-five Hundredth Anniversary of Buddhism celebrated in Laos in 1957. One exhibit dealt with Buddhist art in the United States, and

a special issue of the USIS magazine "Free World," issued in the Lao language, portrayed some of the holy shrines of Buddhism in Southeast Asia and concluded with a description of Buddhists in the United States. Lao newsreels have dealt with various religious ceremonies. Again, few surveys have been made and it is difficult to judge the impact of this propaganda. On the basis of a number of casual conversations with villagers, monks and townspeople, it is possible to infer that the materials and films are favorably received, although they are not necessarily associated with United States objectives. An Abbot at one wat handed some USIS Buddhist booklets to a visitor at the same time telling him in very strong terms how the Americans were ruining his country by corrupting the people. Information agency officials would deny that they are seeking direct credit for producing this material; rather their claim is that they are doing it to produce a favorable climate, both for the Lao government and their own more specific propaganda. The extent to which they are succeeding in these efforts is an open question.

More direct are English language teaching programs among the monks. Several have been sent to America for advance study. USIS also assists the priesthood in producing newspapers and other publications. The Asia Foundation, a private agency, which has only recently begun operating in Laos, has started

certainly not anti-American. This feeling would be reinforced on observing USIS posters tacked on the walls of their living quarters and seeing them enjoy USIS films at festivals given in honor of the pagoda.

However, a few days later the American visitor might be more than a little surprised to see the same monk warmly receiving a Communist Pathet Lao leader and listening to him relate his heroic adventures in the jungle. The Communist presents his life as one of sacrifice and self-denial for a noble end,

arousing sympathy in his priestly audience who link his efforts to the ascetic tradition of Buddhism. This is particularly true since the Pathet Lao representative contrasts himself, a poor man, with the rich officials who are linked to the American Imperialists. Among monks and townspeople as well as villagers the Pathet Lao are known as the Po Pak or People of the Forest.

Let us examine further the learning of English by the monks and the attitudes associated with it. For one thing, a language can be used only as a technique and the culture associated with it ignored or even reviled. An example is the fact that the North Vietnamese government publishes more English language propaganda materials than does South Vietnam. According to recent visitors to Red China English is still used as the language of instruction in certain schools such as that of medicine in Peking, because of established tradition and the difficulties inherent in switching over to Russian.

When asked by a non-Westerner why he is studying English, a Buddhist monk replied, "To get a good government job after I leave the priesthood." This seems far removed from the concept of monastic life in our own culture, but we must not view the reply in terms of our culture. Buddhist monks remain in the priesthood only as long as they wish to, and the pagoda training is used by some as a kind of inexpensive boarding school.

Some are even rather aggressive in requesting special instruction such as English language training.

How is this desire for a government job reconciled then with a pro-Pathet Lao attitude and an anti-government point of view? Of course, there is no reason why contradictions cannot exist in an individual's thinking, but those who have thought about this question have given these answers, "I will work with this government until its leadership changes," or "With increased education I may obtain a more favored position with a new government." This position is particularly prevalent among the younger monks in the larger centers such as Vientiane and Luang Prabang.

Is this any reason for USIS to stop teaching English? No, but perhaps the teaching should be more closely integrated with the curriculum of the pagoda schools. At present some USIS officers teach monks in their own homes or stop at the wat once or twice a week to offer instruction, but is it not possible to consider having one or two USIS officers teach full time in the pagoda schools? All kinds of teachers, except those of strictly religious subjects, are badly lacking, and the school administrators would probably welcome almost any type of courses on an intellectual level. For example, soon after the author became friendly with some monks he was asked to lecture on

western religion at their schools. Courses could be given on western history, customs, institutions and the philosophy of democracy. No religious commitment would be required from the outside teachers in a pagoda school since Buddhism does not view itself as an exclusive religion. We must be flexible and realize the need for coming into direct contact with Lao culture in more than merely a mechanical way.

Village Society and Aid Programs

We turn now to one of the praised but poorly understood aspects of American aid. It is almost impossible to discuss this problem without referring to the current best seller The Ugly American, in which through a series of semi-fictionalized episodes the point is made that the only way to have a successful aid program and by implication to achieve our political goals is to have sympathetic American technicians working out in the villages with the people. This procedure is opposed to the clustered communities of Americans existing in the capital city keeping each other busy with memoranda and cocktail parties. Let us take a close look at the specific situation in Laos and examine some of the programs and their results. Here we are concerned with the interactions of three specific social groups and the ways in which they administer and react to a

given program. The three groups are the American diplomats and aid officials, the Lao government personnel and the village and tribal peoples of Laos who are supposed to receive the benefits of these given programs.

Let us start with the program. Like so many other aspects of human behavior the further one is removed intellectually and emotionally from the process of carrying out a program, the simpler it appears. Village aid might be interpreted as meaning the focusing of certain government services on the village -- agricultural extension, public health, rural education, and the provision of appropriate equipment and experts when called for. Even in a country with as rudimentary a government structure as Laos, agriculture, health and education are already established ministries. However, on the provincial, district and village levels there arises a real problem of coordination, especially since there is an acute scarcity of trained personnel. This problem is widespread in newly independent countries which are suddenly confronted with the political and economic implications of rural isolation and poverty. Partly with the advice of American experts in rural extension services, the government of India set up a Ministry of Community Development to direct a nationwide program of coordinated village aid. India's pattern has been widely copied. Several years ago American aid officials

began to send Lao personnel to India to observe these programs. In 1958 a Bureau for Village Development was set up in the Lao Ministry of Social Affairs and in 1959 was allocated a modest budget to aid village development by participating in the financing of projects such as road building, well digging and construction of other village facilities. These funds are to be dispensed by regional committees composed of the heads of all the provincial departments, with the Governor acting as chairman.

Prior to the establishment of this organization the government had concentrated much of its efforts on Civil Action, a crash-type program modeled on a similar organization in Vietnam which was active in resettling refugees from the North when the Republic of South Vietnam was created at the end of the Indochina War. Led by a Lao army colonel and financially supported by United States military and economic aid agencies, groups of young men, mostly soldiers, were selected for six week courses designed to make them "experts" in education, agriculture, health and propaganda. Then they were sent out into the field to work in the villages giving advice and instruction, distributing medicine and agricultural equipment and showing films. For various reasons which we will subsequently examine this program has been largely abandoned.

At present the Army, with backing from the American military liaison group, is preparing another rural development program to be administered by "Teams of Six." The ultimate objective is to have a team operating in every one of the 600 districts in the Kingdom. These teams are similar in composition to those of the Civic Action program and are under the command of a colonel in the psychological warfare branch of the Lao Army. Their training is variable, ranging from a few weeks to several months. These teams will reside permanently in the particular district to which they are assigned and will not be mobile as was the case with the Civic Action teams.

At the same time the different technical ministries of the Lao government have their own programs for village development and so have not been enthusiastic supporters of this Army program. This is particularly true since the latter have been relatively well supplied with funds while the ministries have had to constantly scale down their own projects. The technical ministries are severely limited by lack of personnel available for rural projects. In the Health Ministry they are occupied with running the hospitals in the provincial capitals. The Agriculture Ministry, with only a few people with any degree of technical training above highschool level, are largely occupied in running experimental stations. It is the Education Ministry which has

the largest number of trained personnel in direct contact with villages.

A few years ago there was a program under which a number of village teachers paid with American aid funds were instructed to devote half the day to teaching and the other half to showing the children carpentry techniques and gardening methods and instructing them in health practices. This program was eventually dropped.

Currently a Belgian UNESCO expert associated with the Ministry of Education has established a center staffed with Lao personnel trained at the UNESCO Fundamental Education Center in Thailand. Other village aid programs include the work of Operation Brotherhood. In addition to medical personnel the Philippine group also has people trained in social work who attempt some public health work. The American International Voluntary Services team in Xieng Khouang has a public health nurse and also does work in agricultural education. Not all these small programs are in direct competition, of course, since they tend to operate in different parts of the country. The work of the military, however, poses a problem for the civilian agencies engaged in similar activities. There are also conflicts among American personnel and divisions corresponding

to frictions in the Lao government, since the expert understandably tends to associate himself with the agency with which he has direct contact. It should be pointed out that like most activities of the Lao government the above programs are financed largely or exclusively with American funds.

How have villages responded to these programs? We can give some sample responses to the Civic Action program. Civic Action was intended to make an immediate impact on the villagers, showing the people that their government had a real interest in their welfare and in bettering their living conditions in a dramatic way. In one case, a Civic Action team went to a village and put up a row of houses - after their departure the villagers were asked their reaction. They replied that the work of the government officials had nothing to do with them, for they were not told about the team's activity. When asked if they would use the houses they said they already had good homes of their own and even in case of need they would prefer to build their own since those put up by Civic Action were poorly constructed.

A visit to a Civic Action model village about twenty miles from Vientiane was revealing. On the main road is a brightly lettered sign pointing to the village, and after turning off

to the village trail the traveler is inspired by further signs every few kilometers. Arriving in the village he finds that an attempt has been made to pave the lanes. There are also street signs, but during the rainy season these efforts are largely obliterated. The model section consists of a neatly fenced compound at the edge of the village. Inside the enclosure is a new concrete well, a school, a hall and first aid station plus a school and living quarters for the Civic Action personnel. A flower and vegetable garden is included in the compound. On the day of the writer's visit, the Civic Action personnel were all away but several of the village elders were happy to chat about the project. They said they were not consulted about the location of the new facilities nor did they request them. The man who owns the land on which the new buildings were erected was informed that if the project proves a success he would be paid in a few years; otherwise the land would be returned to him. The villagers do use the new concrete well, but there exists the sentiment that the original well on the property had been taken away from its owner and that the new well does not belong to anyone. The village children use the school but the people are talking about erecting their "own" nearer the pagoda. All the buildings in the compound were constructed by hired labor imported for the occasion from

Vientiane. The villagers had expressed great interest in having a permanent nurse assigned to them, but at the time of the writer's visit in the summer of 1959 this had not yet taken place. When asked what kind of project they would consider most important to them, the villagers replied that a good road linking their community with the main road was something they all desired.

Other Civic Action activities have included courses of approximately one month duration to all county (muong) chiefs and then allowing them to spend brief periods in other parts of the country to gain some perspective on their own local problem. There have also been conferences of the provincial governors. Less intensive courses have been given to district and village chiefs (tassengs and nai bans) in certain provincial centers. The tassengs are locally elected while the county administrator (chao muongs) are appointed by the central government and are part of the Lao civil service. In any case, because of the change of programs these courses are not being continued.

Continuity is extremely important in principle as well as from the point of view of the villagers and the Lao officials, but this is lacking in all these programs. When the author

traveled upstream on the Mekong River in 1957 as the representative of the American aid mission in northern Laos he was asked at many villages why the school teachers had not received vegetable seeds as they had the previous year. It was hard to explain to them that that had been a "one-shot affair" and that if the seed project were reinstated it would be under the agricultural division of USOM, not the education division which made the original distribution. In all fairness to the American aid personnel and to the Lao government, consistent planning is difficult since it must vary from year to year depending on fluctuating Congressional appropriations. This system is also rather wasteful.

Programs such as Civic Action, the Teams of Six and others where the free distribution of commodities plays a large role has put many well meaning Lao government and American aid officials in the position of traveling around the countryside and asking the villagers what kind of assistance they would like to have. Since this commodity assistance is paid for almost entirely by American aid funds, it sets up high expectations on the part of villagers which their government cannot hope to fulfill over an extended period of time. In addition the villagers are recipients of government charity. This can hardly lead to concepts of responsible citizenship.

The village aid program organized a little over a year ago with the assistance of the Community Development Division of USOM is an attempt to meet this problem. Under this new program the government provides a certain amount of capital for a given project and the villagers provide the balance and furnish all the labor. This program is undoubtedly one of the most fruitful to have been undertaken to date and has potentialities. Among its positive points other than emphasis on labor and cash contribution is the fact that the village initiates the request. It is acted upon not by the central government but by a group of provincial officials who tend to be much more familiar with special local problems.

Viewing this program as a whole, the largest number of projects and the greatest amount of funds have been concentrated in building or repairing pagodas. Considering the values of Lao culture both rural and urban, this is not at all surprising. Maintaining a wat not only provides a community facility, often used as a general meeting place, but also adds to religious merit making possible a better rebirth. Ideally, this should be a way in which the USOM program could gain much good will or "merit". However, our officials have had their hands tied by Congressional legislation dealing with the foreign aid program, a legislation reflecting ethnocentrism and pressure groups

in our own culture, specifying that no aid funds can be used to help non-Christian religious groups. To a certain extent American officials have gotten around this by claiming that the funds have been used to build rest houses or village schools. This is not completely illogical since both of these functions are performed by village pagodas. In any case our officials are prevented from using this situation in the most advantageous way in terms of making an impact on local public opinion.

The lack of technicians to follow up on certain activities can also create difficulties. For example, if a new concrete well later becomes polluted expert advice on the best way to clean it is usually lacking. The villagers have no way to send for such a person even if he were available. As a result some wells are abandoned when they could easily be made serviceable again.

It is also hard to put across the reciprocal nature of the program, and some villages see in it the possibility to obtain a free gift. In one village the people were given galvanized sheet-metal roofing for a pagoda, but construction had not even begun so that the roofing was sold and the money put into a general fund until more could be raised. This metal roofing is an important prestige item in many areas, but whether it is an essential item in a village development program might be questioned.

As might be expected distinct favoritism is shown to Lao villages as opposed to those of other groups. The explanation that the mountain villages are scattered and small in population is only partially convincing. Perhaps the most significant thing is that small as the funds set aside for non-Lao groups are, they are proportionately larger than they have been in analogous situations in the past. This seems to be a trend. In certain provinces more schools are being built in tribal villages and some Lao officials at least are more aware of their responsibilities toward the mountain peoples.

We can infer from this brief survey that certain programs are not clearly defined. In many cases they are duplicated and compete with one another.

No matter how thoughtfully and idealistically conceived a program will not work well unless there is some follow-up evaluation -- that is, a chance for analysis and revision to eliminate defects. Thus far the American aid officials have been so busy conceiving programs and having them approved in Washington that they appear to have had little energy for evaluation. End use observers for checking the expenditures of funds and uses of equipment of foreign aid missions have been discussed extensively in Congressional hearings, but applying research procedures to assess the impact of aid programs

on rural populations is thought to have no practical value in an action program. Actually whether the funds are wasted or not in a purely economic sense is often not the only important matter. Equally significant is the end political and social effect. This is something in which our aid planners have not yet shown serious interest.

Lao Officials

Let us look now at the Lao officials in Vientiane and the ways in which the American aid program has affected their values. Closely related to the question of village aid has been the great difficulty in persuading Lao officials, particularly those of middle rank, to spend more time in rural areas. Although it was not our aid mission's announced intention, a significant result has been to make Vientiane a much more attractive place to live from the point of view of the average government official. At the same time conditions in the villages have remained basically similar. Since the beginning of the American aid program Vientiane has blossomed forth with air-conditioned movies with cinemascope screens, pastry shops, night clubs with taxi dancers imported from Hong Kong and Saigon, many new restaurants, a startling increase in the number of automobiles -- to say nothing of improved educational and hospital facilities. Many of these

innovations might appear rather primitive or even pathetic to the sophisticated westerner, but to a Lao with six years of education who at most may have had a trip to Bangkok or Saigon these developments have great appeal. Certainly they are much more enticing than what provincial towns have to offer and infinitely more so than an average village of Laos, which most likely is reached by trail and has neither electricity nor radio.

Such a situation is by no means unique to Laos. In fact countries as industrially advanced as the USSR have had articles in their newspapers complaining of the difficulties in getting officials to leave Moscow. But the problem is acute in Laos, where in many areas contacts with the central government exist in name only. For example, in the setting up of the Fundamental Education Center the teachers who were trained in Thailand showed a positive distaste for living in villages on a permanent basis. As a result, their center was established on the edge of Vientiane rather than in a village area removed from the capital as was desired by the UNESCO expert. In the course of their travels several of the students had managed to acquire automobiles which operate quite well on the streets of Vientiane but which would do poorly on muddy village roads.

In another case, a high Lao government official asked a Meo headman to move down into the valley so he could more easily come in contact with the tribal leader. As he explained to the Meo, "I can travel only by road."

Some American officials have cited the increasing prevalence of cars and bicycles as a sign of economic advancement. Compared to other countries of Asia and even certain countries in Europe, automobiles are much more common among Lao officials of the higher and middle ranks. Thus almost every Minister and department head has a Mercedes Benz and some have several. A certain number of these are furnished officially. Middle rank officials such as, for instance, a Lieutenant in the Police, may have a Nash Rambler. Less fortunate ones have motor bikes or bicycles. Jeeps are also extremely common, many of which have been furnished to various government agencies under the American aid program. It is quite true that no American agency has officially furnished expensive civilian automobiles to Lao government officials, but almost all have come in as by-products of our subsidization of the Army and the general economy of Laos. All the gasoline necessary to run them is imported, and since Laos has very few exports these imports would not be possible if the American aid program were discontinued. The operation of these automobiles contributes to

the pleasure and convenience of Lao officials and merchants and represents a drain on the national economy of Laos. This raises a sharp question: to what extent can American officials control the use of the aid funds?

A great deal of construction of homes, office buildings, hotels and stores has occurred in Vientiane within the past few years. To service these new buildings the American aid mission has installed a diesel-operated power plant which replaced an earlier charcoal-operated one. Undoubtedly a certain growth of Vientiane is inevitable in the development of Laos as a national state, but to a large extent the present boom is artificial, based as it is almost entirely on outside aid.

Just as Laos cannot operate its power plant nor its automobiles without foreign imports, so she cannot feed her urban population without importing rice. The major amount of rice consumed in the Vientiane area is still purchased from Thailand. The roads connecting Vientiane with the provinces are safely open only during the dry season. Those areas which produce a rice surplus often lack means of transporting it to Vientiane.

Some local industries such as logging and sawmills have begun to develop but they are still in their infancy. They, too, are handicapped by lack of all-weather roads. It is not the writer's intention to make a detailed survey of the economic

problems of Lao but merely to indicate their existence. The concern here is the effect of the development of the capital city on the contacts between Lao officials and the villagers. Social and economic distance has definitely been increased. As a French scholar put it, "A villager can more easily approach an official on a bicycle than if he rides in a chauffeured Mercedes Benz."

Resentment is strong among the rural population, and the writer has been asked any number of times, "Why is it that you Americans give all your money to the rich people who live in town and never think of us?" This issue has been exploited by the Pathet Lao in election campaigns and is perhaps one of the reasons why so many of their candidates won by large majority in the last election in 1958. The villagers' query is not true in theory; if one examines the aid program, one sees that many of the projects are directly concerned with rural people. Nevertheless, technical aid as opposed to military aid is relatively small. Even if one includes the funds available for road building, the total technical program has averaged less than four million dollars annually. By contrast the military aid expenditure is more than four times as great. The Royal Lao troops in the provinces often spend their salaries locally. This could perhaps be considered an indirect form of rural aid.

But a good portion of military aid funds have remained in Vientiane, partly as a result of their illegal manipulation by Lao officials and partly through an import program at the artificial United States subsidized exchange rates which prevailed until last year. Under this program large profits were made, some of which were subsequently reinvested in Vientiane business and real estate. The import program of consumer goods, of which much has already been written, was designed to absorb the Lao kip generated by payment of salaries to the military.

Perhaps the most crucial factor has been that the living standards of the officials, particularly those in the upper echelons, has greatly increased while the living standards in the countryside have remained stable, thus increasing the gap between the elite and their fellow countrymen (even though the living standard of the former are still quite simple by European and particularly American standards). The political implication of this widening gap cannot be ignored.

American Community in Laos

In considering the triangular relationship existing among the Lao officials, the villagers and the Americans in Laos, it remains now to take a brief look at the American community. The four components of this community were named in the

introduction to this paper. Personnel figures vary, but at the present time it is safe to estimate that there are well over 200 employees of the United States government in Laos.

In the Embassy, in addition to the Ambassador and Consul, there are a number of officers who deal exclusively with political affairs, as well as a commercial attaché and various administrative officers. USIS is headed by a Director and Deputy and has people engaged in specialized affairs such as press, film and cultural affairs, in addition to several provincial affairs officers. The largest group of Americans are associated with USOM, and PEO, the military aid mission. The following is a partial listing of some of the divisions of the aid mission, each of which has a full time American staff: Programming Planning, Agriculture, Health, Education, Community Development, Public Administration and large divisions concerned with personnel and administrative matters, that is, technical support for the Americans.

Since there is a lack of locally trained personnel great numbers of so-called Third-Country Nationals have been imported to Vientiane to assist the American officials in various tasks. Among the nationalities represented are Filipinos, Thai, Vietnamese from Saigon and Chinese from Hong Kong. They perform a variety of jobs -- secretaries, accountants, translator-

interpreters, warehouse clerks and administrative assistants. The Lao employed by American agencies are, with very few exceptions, coolies and chauffeurs.

Each of the American organizations has its own separate headquarters. In each case, it is considered inadequate and is in the process of being expanded. The Embassy is currently adding a new wing, and the Information Service has recently moved to larger quarters occupying one floor of a new hotel in Vientiane. In addition to a large barbed-wire-enclosed compound of barrack-type office buildings and staff housing, USOM has recently taken over a three-story air-conditioned office building in another part of town. PEO facilities have expanded by moving into some of the former USOM buildings and also constructing new ones.

The American community operates more or less independently of the local economy. There is a commissary, which is stocked with bi-weekly air-shipments from the larger American warehouse in Bangkok, and the community is serviced by its own carpenters, plumbers, water trucks and 24-hour a day chauffeur service. There are several housing compounds for the official Americans and their families. One consists of a group of about two dozen prefabricated aluminum houses. Another compound, this one of American style ranch homes, is located several kilometers

outside the capital and is currently being enlarged from 14 to 84 houses. On the periphery bachelor quarters for Filipino employees of the mission are being built.

With housing and transportation provided and with food and various types of recreation available within the community, it is entirely possible for Americans in Laos to have no contact with the peoples of Laos should they so desire and the nature of their work permit. Their offices are usually separate from the corresponding Lao ministries. In one of the few cases where Lao and American offices are together, it is interesting to note that the latter's police advisory group has its own detached airconditioned building located on the grounds of the main police station.

What effect has this policy of exclusiveness had on the local population? No attempts to examine this question have been made by American officials, but local French scholars have undertaken an extensive public opinion survey and analysis of the attitudes and interrelationships among the different ethnic groups in Vientiane. Comments were solicited from various strata of society in the capital from pedicab drivers to middle-echelon government officials. Certain reactions seem to predominate with regard to Americans. On the one hand, the material culture or, as the French-educated Lao say, the

technique of the Americans was very much admired. Further, the high salaries offered by Americans made working for them desirable. On the other hand, the exclusiveness, to the extent that some informants termed it racism, was hotly resented. These viewpoints were not universal, it must be mentioned, but they were nevertheless widely held.

To maintain a self-contained American community in a country such as Laos is no easy task. It is only recently that housing conditions, office space and commissary supplies have been termed adequate. Having reached this point, most of the divisions of the official American community are now stressing the need for increased personnel.

Many of the technicians associated with the American aid program fail to see the broad political implications of their work. This is partly the result of their having received little if any orientation regarding the history, culture and economy of Laos. Apparently little effort is made to enable the technician to see where his personal effort fits into the overall picture. Classification of such information heightens this problem.

Individual attitudes among Americans range from those who count the days until the end of their assignment and wonder how they ever came to be stationed in such a place, to those

who show a real curiosity about the country and the people. The opinions of the former, often openly expressed in front of the Lao, do not help create a favorable impression. At the same time little is done by the American officials in charge to encourage the latter in their point of view.

Conclusions

It is not possible to tie up all these complex factors in one neat package. The information presented here has purposely been given in a brief and somewhat impressionistic style. Detailed factual documentation has been omitted, since this is a preliminary report designed to stimulate comments and discussion. Enough examples have been given, however, to indicate some of the specific problems involved. The following are tentative conclusions:

1. Problems faced in Laos reflect in exaggerated form difficulties confronting American policy in many other parts of the world. Perhaps the most crucial factor is our government's lack of long-range planning and our inability to see the effects of our aid program as a whole. During the past few years we have had a unique opportunity for leadership in Laos. Both the officials and villagers have received American representatives in a friendly manner. What we have had to offer

them has been largely a sterile form of anti-Communism, preservation of the status quo and an abundance of material gifts. A high ranking officer in the United States aid mission told the author that it was necessary to proceed slowly in technical assistance programs because otherwise we might disturb the traditional social system. He seemed quite unaware that our aid program has transformed the social system at least in the towns and has given villagers many new ideas. After five years and the expenditure of approximately two hundred million dollars on a population of some two million there has been little positive economic development in terms of exports or small industries. There does not even appear to be much enthusiasm for the Royal Lao government. This should not be interpreted to mean that the majority of the population is pro-Communist but rather that most people appear to be indifferent. Our huge outpour of aid has provoked little enthusiasm; even in certain non-Communist quarters it has caused hostility. In all fairness to both American and Lao administrators, it is necessary to bear in mind that the program's chief aim and major funds have been military.

At this point one might logically ask, "Isn't an army one of the first requirements for the continued existence of Laos and hasn't this need been proven by the recent Vietnamese

incursions in the northern provinces of Sam Neua and Phong Saly?" Further, to paraphrase State Department officials, "Isn't the continued survival of Laos proof of the value of our program?" These statements certainly have much to support them. Yet it is possible to disagree, not with their factual implications but rather with a point of view they seem to represent. In fact, the basic point of view expressed in this paper is not that the American program has been an utter and complete failure -- this is patently false -- but that it has not been sufficiently imaginative. It is quite true that Laos is still an independent nation, but one questions how long it will remain this way and to what extent the people associate their fate with that of their government.

No one has ever seriously contended that the Lao Army could provide more than a deterrent or temporary obstacle to the armies of North Vietnam, to say nothing of the military forces of China. This writer maintains that by concentrating on external military forces insufficient consideration has been given to the threat of internal subversion or even to Communist control through legal elections. In fact certain Lao officials have talked of postponing elections for fear of Pathet Lao victory.

By concentrating primarily on a program of direct military

subsidies, even defense associated activities such as road construction have never been undertaken in a serious or comprehensive manner. With most of our funds going to pay the salaries of soldiers and police, we have yet to aid in the construction of any all-weather roads. Would it have been possible to get along with less personnel, or pay them smaller salaries? Could their labor have been enlisted in tasks such as road building? Should we have provided more aid in the form of materials or even overseen the construction of projects and then turned them over to the Lao as the French have done as, for example, in the case of a lycée in Vientiane? To what extent has our emphasis on military aid reflected the ideas and values of leading Lao government officials or the population at large? What types of programs are most likely to enlist the support of the rural population? Have we over-extended ourselves by attempting to simultaneously initiate programs in fields as diverse as public health, transportation, education and agriculture, each with many separate projects, or would it have been better to concentrate our efforts in only a few fields? These are some of the questions which deserve discussion and have so far received little attention. Many of these matters are obviously internal affairs of the Lao government, but they do become an American policy concern when the expenditure of foreign aid funds is involved.

As has often been stated, Communism is above all a system of ideas that can best be met on the ideological level regardless of whether it is an ideology oriented toward intellectuals or peasants. Our ideas of individual liberty, political democracy and the creative value of labor badly need redefining in the light of Southeast Asian cultures. The United States cannot, nor do we wish to, force our ideas on others but we can make them attractive as possible. Certainly, the over-emphasis on the amount of aid rather than the kind of aid and the way in which it is administered may prove to be misleading. The author believes that Americans are capable of representing more than a technology and high standard of living.

2. Let us turn now from broad policy objectives to instrumental matters: the securing by our diplomatic and economic aid missions of certain types of information which have to date been rather consistently ignored. Aside from working with economists and to a lesser extent political scientists, our diplomats and technicians have generally avoided using services of specialists in the fields of sociology, anthropology, social psychology, agricultural economics, human geography and demography. Inquiries concerning basic information on Laos usually meet with the response that the data exists but that it is classified. More than one official admitted to the

writer that some reports were not correlated to give a meaningful over-all view nor were they generally available. USOM files are full of highway, river and airport surveys. No one seems to know how much cash income an average farmer has or how much rice he grows, the way in which a Buddhist temple is organized or what the characteristic features of Lao Buddhism are as opposed to the Thai or Cambodian versions. This neglect of cultural factors and concern with the mechanics of operating programs rather than with people and ideas seems to be a fairly deeply imbedded characteristic of many aspects of our aid program.

3. It is difficult to imagine an aid program pleasing to all parties concerned. There are hard working, well trained and conscientious Americans in Laos who do travel in the provinces. By and large the various Point Four assistance programs have been well received. Some sense of partnership does exist, particularly between American and Lao technicians. But a few positive achievements do not necessarily make for success in the overall program.

Most Lao government officials at the policy making level are in sympathy with our objectives, namely to preserve Lao independence and prevent Communist infiltration at the same time providing technical and economic assistance enabling the

government of Laos to eventually be self-supporting, capable of effectively governing her own people and providing them with some of the services deemed necessary in the contemporary world. To our detriment, however, we have failed to inspire a real sense of partnership for the achievement of these goals which we share. Many Lao elite seem to have the impression that our interests are those of only short term expediency. The points of view one hears so often in the United States to justify our military and economic aid programs are frequently anathema to the people for whom the aid is destined. An example of this approach is the idea that we primarily wish to deny to the Communists a strategic land, or, as more blatantly expressed by many disillusioned lower echelon American officials in Laos, "We are only renting real estate here." Is it surprising that such an attitude accompanied by the distribution of large sums of money often leads to cynical corruption and embezzlement on a large scale? Or as more than one high ranking Lao official declared, "Our foreign policy merits American assistance," with the implication that if this were not forthcoming the way might be opened to a change in their policy.

Our involvement in Laos and Southeast Asia is basically not a short range affair but a long term commitment. This factor needs to be stressed more in our dealings with countries

such as Laos. It is unlikely that this will be done as long as the need for long-range commitments is not accepted by either Congress or the public at large. This is not to imply that we should indefinitely continue our aid program to Laos on the same basis as we have for the past five years, that is, defacto support of the major part of the government budget in almost all areas and complete support in military matters. We should explore with the peoples of Laos ways in which dependence can be lessened and positive economic and social progress achieved. From the point of view of the American taxpayer this is also the cheaper way, as many observers have pointed out, but like many true economies this requires vision and imagination or what has been called enlightened self interest.

4. The evolution of a more positive American foreign policy in Laos and Southeast Asia generally, however, requires more than Congressional action combined with dedicated and imaginative leadership. It needs the modification of certain American cultural traits, which is something considerably more difficult. This raises the intriguing and broad philosophical question of the extent to which we are capable of consciously shaping our modes of behavior for the achievements of agreed-upon goals. Anthropologists and philosophers have wrestled with the problem without coming to any definite conclusion.

How would this relate to our aid program in Laos? Some of these patterns have been mentioned -- for example, the creation of a Little America in an alien cultural setting in terms of housing, food, office procedures, recreation and religion, to name some of the more important items. Is this so different from the behavior of French, Russian, Chinese, or British in similar situations? No, but there is a quantitative difference that has qualitative implications. The American standard of living is the costliest in the world. To duplicate the various types of appliances, processed foods and housing to which the average American is accustomed requires much more effort than to provide analogous conveniences for French, Russian, or British overseas communities. Our prodigious wealth, however, enables us to set up little Americas overseas and to provide a good portion of stateside conveniences. Some material accoutrements tend to be more heavily stressed in American culture, as anyone familiar with French plumbing or British household heating can readily observe. As we have already seen these material embellishments tend to create barriers between the Americans and the local population, even among the élite.

Two seemingly contradictory aspects of American culture which coexist, although not without conflict, tend to be stressed in the implementation of foreign aid program:

action and organization. Historically, America was a frontier land, and many elements of our national character can be traced through the types of society developed during the push Westward. One of these was an emphasis on action, sometimes for its own sake, as opposed to reflection and consideration of alternative causes of behavior. In addition to being a country developed as part of a pioneer settling of a vast land, America is a huge, complex nation-state, with one of the largest populations in the world and probably the most involved technology on earth.

The administrative apparatus of this entity has evolved at a rate even faster than that of the economy. This has been readily apparent even to those who have not read the little book by Professor Parkinson in which he maintains in a not entirely satirical manner that the number of administrative personnel increases regardless of the work to be performed. It is not my intention to maintain that this concept is applicable to agencies of the American government in Laos. What is important in this instance is that the administrative structure is a large and involved one which is in certain respects self-perpetuating. Many technicians in Laos have remarked on the increasing amount of time they have to spend in office work, conferences and the compiling of administrative reports. As has been mentioned, many officials in the American Embassy and

the aid mission have as their functions the logistic support or coordination of the other American personnel, plus committees, conferences, memos, proposals and programming which are part of American business and governmental culture, and it would be unrealistic to categorically state that they should or could be eliminated. Even though in certain short run aspects it might be said that a democratic bureaucracy operates less flexibly than a totalitarian one where the decision-making is more centralized, few Americans would want to arbitrarily abolish all of these procedures and make the process more authoritarian.

Significant in this connection is the apparent conflict between office procedures, often resentfully called red tape, and action or field work. These procedures do have the common characteristics of both relying on "action" in the broad sense to solve problems. Some observers have called this the optimism syndrome in American culture. All that is needed to solve a given situation is more personnel, more coordination, committees, money and more hard working dedicated people out in the provinces. The content of their activity appears to be less important. This is certainly true in the case of the American community in Laos, and whatever one might wish to say about them one cannot call them idle. Indeed, much of the criticism in this paper has revolved about the direction of their

energies rather than the lack of them.

The observations of a foreign scholar in a farming community in one of the western states of America may give us some insight into the situation in Laos. That investigator found that the local inhabitants seemed to divide human beings into three categories which she entitled Scenery, Machinery and People. In the first category were the Indians on a local reservation, whom the family might see and photograph on a Sunday drive; the second category were migrant farm laborers who had to be fed, housed and supervised not unlike the farmer's domestic animals; the farmer's neighbors, relatives and friends with whom he socialized and with whom his children attended school and church represented the third category. Although these concepts cannot be taken over completely into the Laos situation, both the scenery and machinery categories seem to have been applied by local Americans. Photographs and costumes of the mountain people and the Lao are much prized; similarly, the valley Lao are frequently regarded as living an idyllic life without cares, conflicts or tensions. They also tend to be regarded as objects of Communist subversion, charity, or community development programs which will either "destroy" the country or bring about its salvation.

Certainly various programs of action have been advocated here. Essential as these are, might we not wish for a bit more? As a Lao friend remarked about an American official, "Mr. X works very hard and we value his efforts, but we value even more a person who has time to smile and talk." Some people may feel that the Lao do little but the latter, but can we not learn from each other in an atmosphere of friendship? Let us regard the inhabitants of Laos as People.